

2011

Space: A Discovery of Visual Language

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Virginia Commonwealth University

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SPACE

A Discovery of
Visual Language

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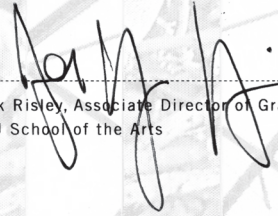
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1

Submitted to the faculty of
Virginia Commonwealth
University's School of the Arts
in partial fulfillment of the

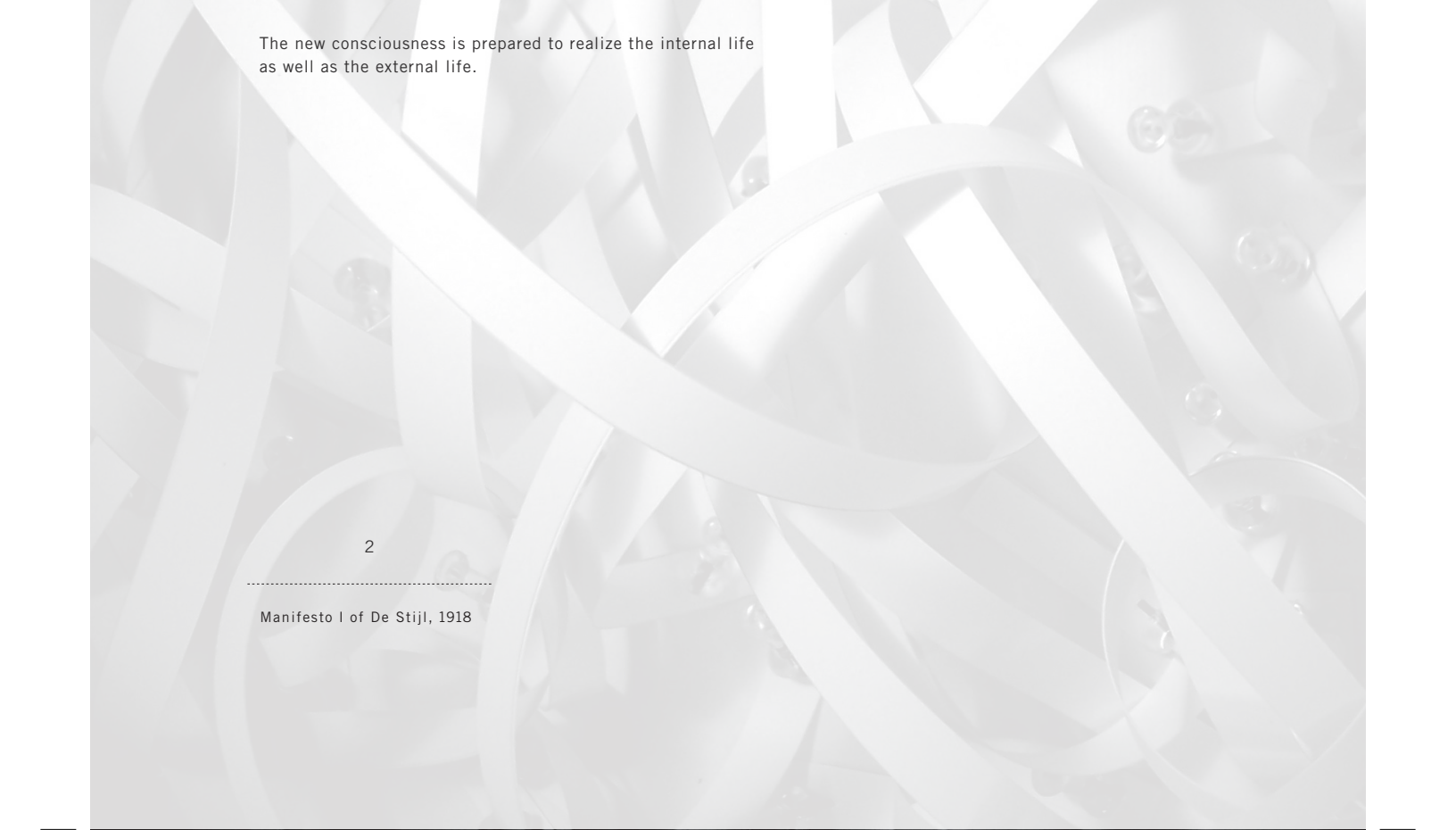
requirements for the degree,
Master of Fine Arts in Design/
Visual Communications.
Richmond, Virginia | May 2011

Kelley D. White

Bachelor of Architecture | School of Architecture + Design
Virginia Polytechnic Institute + State University
Blacksburg, Virginia | May 2007



There is an old and new consciousness of time. The old is
connected with the individual. The new is connected with the
universal. The struggle of the individual against the universal
is revealing itself in...the art of the present day...The new
art has brought forward what the new consciousness of time
contains: a balance between the universal and the individual.



The new consciousness is prepared to realize the internal life as well as the external life.

2

Manifesto I of De Stijl, 1918



ABSTRACT

Space is a visual communicator. The act of perceiving space is a neurological soiree that projects and negotiates meaning in our constructed world. The poetry that we observe within space is tied directly to our emotions and to previous experience. Within ourselves, we each have particular feelings, unconscious or not, relating to height, length, and depth, as well as light and shadow. For example, a long, narrow hallway may elicit anxiety, while an open, sunlit nave in a cathedral may bring about feelings of serenity and joy. Our observations and interactions within the perceptual confines of space reveal clues to construction, movement, and play. Additionally, this participation unveils our awareness of space, and thus, reveals that our relationship with space exists in our acknowledgement of it—in our permitting of perception through conscious participation.

To explore these ideas further, I will utilize typography to create immersive, sensory experiences that challenge interpretation through the application of human thought, or sensations, to non-living things and material states. This method will assist

the observers to rationalize and create meaning within their own world through simplifying an experience in relation to self. Here, spatial language—like light, shadow, dimension, and proximity—will be exposed as a universal and innate part of our perception.

CONTENTS

4	Introduction to Self	6	Problem Statement
5	Introduction to Thoughts	8	Process and Experiments
		43	Confessions
		47	Bibliography
		48	Acknowledgements

INTRODUCTION

I was born and raised in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. In my neighborhood, houses were separated by expanses of dense woods and open fields, and were punctuated by a single lane of loose gravel. At the peak of this sinuous road, and without much transition, was the driveway to my home. The plain, cedar siding stood in stark juxtaposition with the green lawn that was sprinkled with dandelions from spring until fall. Growing-up in this kind of environment greatly influenced my awareness of space—specifically, the emotional significance of light and shadow's affect over any given expanse, revealing mood of the landscape, texture, and metaphor.

Vast, seemingly endless, space was my playground. With every running jostle in the abandoned apple orchard I called home, I watched my shadow, as well as the surrounding environment, dance and transform through daylight and nightfall, through summer and winter. This romantic vision of space expanded as I began traveling at a young age, seeing the gritty streets of Los Angeles at the age of twelve, and six years later, the rocky coastline of Canon Beach, Oregon and the snowy peaks of Mt. Rainer outside of Seattle, Washington.



After receiving a Bachelor of Architecture degree from Virginia Tech in 2007, I continued to travel and embrace the diversity of cultures from one place to the next. I visited the likes of Detroit, Miami, New York, San Francisco, as well as various portions of Italy, Germany and the Netherlands, and even found time to live in Philadelphia, Austin and Washington, DC. All of which have fueled my passion to continually find and create unique and dynamic spaces in our environments.

Reflecting on my journeys thus far, I believe that who we are as individuals is built upon where we live and the cultures we live within. However, I also believe that who we are is ultimately molded by the places we have experienced during our travels—even in the discoveries made by taking a new route to work. Our specific moods, thoughts, and interests adjust to our exposure to extracerebral and intracerebral contexts.¹ Some of which are conscious adjustments and many others are not.

4

¹ In the chapter headed *Emotion and Feeling*, from his book *Toward a Psychology of Art*, Rudolf Arnheim asserts, "All mental events are perceived, either consciously or unconsciously.

These perceived events fall under two categories, which I shall call extracerebral and intracerebral. Extracerebral percepts are directly stimulated by events outside of the brain...

Intracerebral percepts are stimulated by events confined to the brain, such as thoughts, desires, images" (309).



My passion as a designer is to make visible the things that are not necessarily physical or visible, but are no less real. It is difficult to speak about the physical world without personifying it. For example, we say that "light dances along a surface," and that its partner shadow "follows." This linguistic technique allows us to quickly explain complex concepts in an easily understood form in relation to the familiar—human characteristics and 'self.'

To understand any language is to fully understand one's own history—relating life, and those unique experiences that follow, to abstract and concrete thought. My travels, and continuous passion for exploration, have solidified in me that space is language and that there is a universal understanding of 'spatial qualities' among all cultures. Even though each place, and its people, approach the aesthetics and functionality of space differently, they are all capable of acknowledging and utilizing variations of light and shadow, dimension and proximity. We are sensitive to this intense link between space and our emotions because we are all human, and we construct the worlds in which we want to live.



5

WOOD BLOCK STAMPING

Study of geometry + module + type.

Handmade wooden stamps, printing ink on plain paper.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Space can provide universal messages to the conscious minds of individuals through its profound monumentality—its realness, its close proximity, and its unwavering sense of permanence. Through these tangible aspects of monumentality, space becomes communicative, exuding itself as truthful, coloring our emotions and conjuring meaning in relation to our fears, joys, memories, and desires. It does so via relationships that are exposed in the moment of observation and those elements or interactions that evoke connections to our previous experiences.

As technology changes, so will approaches toward designing space, especially our views on collaboration as lines blur between professions like architecture, sculpture, graphic design, environmental design, and exhibition design. The complexity of designing universal messages at monumental scales is growing larger, requiring ambitious design teams with diverse expertise.



The collaboration of a graphic designer, Keetra Dixon Dean, and *The Lab*, an interactive design studio, produced *Plug-In-Play*, a twenty-story interactive public installation for the San Jose, California, Biennale.¹ *The Lab's* website describes this event as “an attempt to create a more accurate representation of the vitality and complexity of our urban environments” through projecting representations of the live—physical and virtual—activity within the installation. The queue of representations along the facade creates an abstracted version of the urban landscape below.

Such intensive projects as this find their historical roots in conceptual art, where the direct connection to our emotions is more prevalent. Conceptual artists, like Jenny Holzer and Barbara Kruger, use monumentality to present controversial or unnerving typographic messages in bold and exacting ways along the exteriors and interiors of buildings. They exploit the availability of public space to pass along meaning to their audiences.

Proximity to an abundant audience allows a unique opportunity to reveal what a space may be saying, what it means, or what it reflects. Here, a designer or artist can use observed or historical



6

¹ *The Lab* is an interactive design studio affiliated within the Rockwell Group, an architectural firm based in New York, New York.

^{2/3} Keetra Dixon Dean + *The Lab*
Plug-In-Play | 2010
San Jose, California



4

information about a space to decide a precise visual narrative in relation to secondary content—an aspect that seems to be lacking in the individual works of Jenny Holzer and Barbara Kruger. Respectively for Holzer and Kruger, the particular spaces chosen (or given) are only important in this sense of proximity that allows the work to be exposed within well trafficked and easily witnessed areas.

There is an instant in Holzer's *Projections* (in Venice, Italy) where Henri Cole's poem, *Blur*, begins to create a more direct conversation with the place of the installation (a police station). However, her and Kruger's individual spaces typically are more about logistics—easy access to the public for the quickest and most powerful impact. This is an admirable component to the success of their work, but it is not the only element of what I believe is true to space and monumentality. These works could



5

continue onto a more powerful path that exposes the relationships within a space as it is observed and how this relates to or changes our perception of the content provided.

Holzer and Kruger use “public” space as a place of access for people or an audience. They do not tend to specifically exploit or reveal the unique qualities of the spaces themselves and/or their content. To an extent, there is an ignorance about the importance or value of space’s ability to communicate. This is an element that we are constantly surrounded by, and very often are unconscious of amongst our everyday routines. The quality of a space—the architecture’s narrative, performed in light and shadow, and through dimension and proximity—is an additional level of intimacy with the audience that is being left out of Holzer’s and Kruger’s respective work, which doesn’t necessarily blur the boundaries of design.

I believe space can be more than just a surface for projection. It can also be the generator/stimulator of emotion (or mixed emotions). Through my work, I wish to expose the unique visual language of space to others.

7

4 Jenny Holzer + Henri Cole
Projections | 1999
Venice, Italy

5 Barbara Kruger
Mary Boone Gallery | 1991
New York, New York

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My process is initiated by wonder. My curiosity is sparked by my desire to understand methods, techniques, and the unexpected. Though wonder by definition is merely surprise attention given to rare objects, it is much more.¹ Wonder is an excited level of emotion and, when deconstructed, is a measure of intensity in emotion’s smallest unit—agitation.² This intensity is neither negative or positive, but is instead simply reactive.

THINK RHINK REACK REACT

In my research, my fascination with wonder, and creating moments of wonder, utilizes methods and techniques specifically related to texture, personification, displacement, and projection over a diverse series of experiments within the visual language of space. My research eventually culminated in one larger creative project, however I view this phase of my process as an experiment that was ultimately fueled by the preceding work.

1 René Descartes

Les Passions de L'Âme

"admiration is a sudden surprise of the soul, which causes in her an inclination to consider with attention the objects which seem rare and extraordinary to her; it

is caused first by an impression in the brain, that represents the object, as rare and consequently, worthy to be seriously considered..." (Article 70).

2 Rudolf Arnheim

Toward a Psychology of Art.

"Emotion, finally, is the *tension*, or *excitement level*, produced by the interaction of mental forces. In the mechanics of the mind, emotion is the stress caused by

the tractions and pressures that constitute mental activity. Thus, emotion does not contribute im pulses of its own, it is merely an effect of the play of forces taking place within the mind" (310).

AUG 2009

SEP

OCT

NOV

DEC

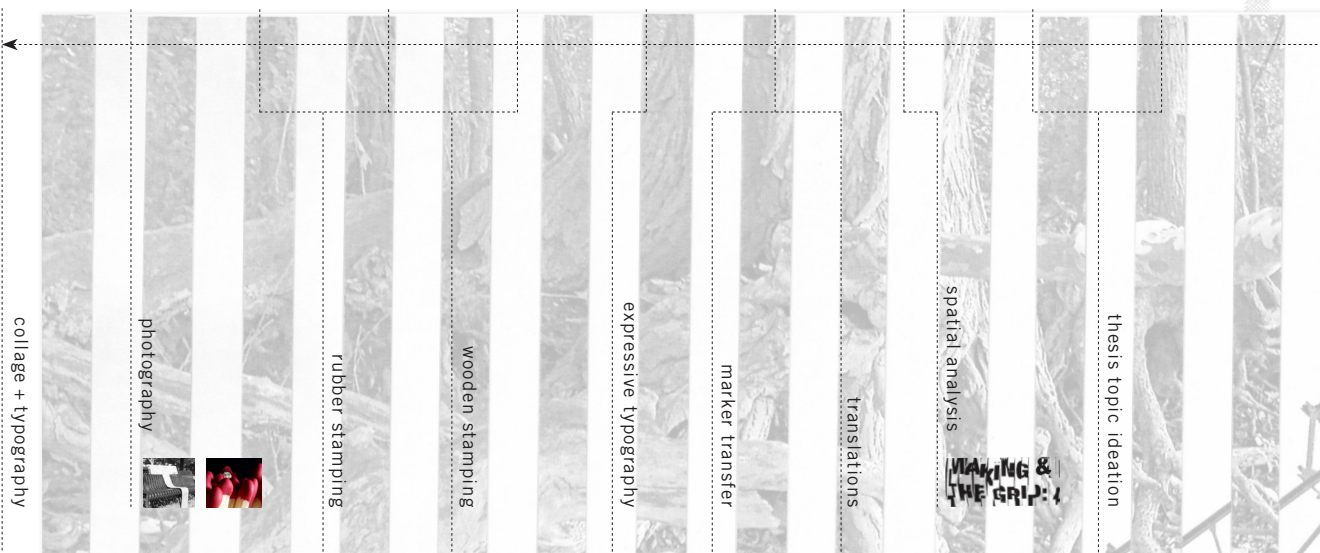
JAN 2010

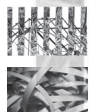
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MAY





uniqueness + the unexpected

uniqueness + the unexpected

personification

structuralism

formal relationships

capturing essence
of an experience

displacement
+
intertwining
structures

module + texture
control vs. intuition

linguistic
deconstruction

the grid +
deconstruction +
examining the
vernacular of
architecture and
graphic design

PROCESS TIMELINE

ideas + methods/techniques
over the course of two years

I love working with my hands and using lo-fi techniques. I believe everything is a tool, and should be utilized as needed. I enjoy looking beyond the easy access of the computer in order to find similar solutions that have more of a unique one-of-a-kind quality. Typically, this develops into a fascination with texture and spatial structures, and very often is juxtaposed with a little bit of silliness.

AUG 2010

SEP

OCT

NOV

DEC

JAN 2011

FEB

MAR

APR

MAY

typographic experimentation

3D modeling

marker transfer

film + animation

site + content collection

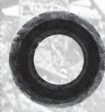
marker transfer

type + image

collaboration

graduation





texture + the unexpected

generating wonder + anthropomorphism

reveal + perception + space

displacement + testing legibility

light + projection

10

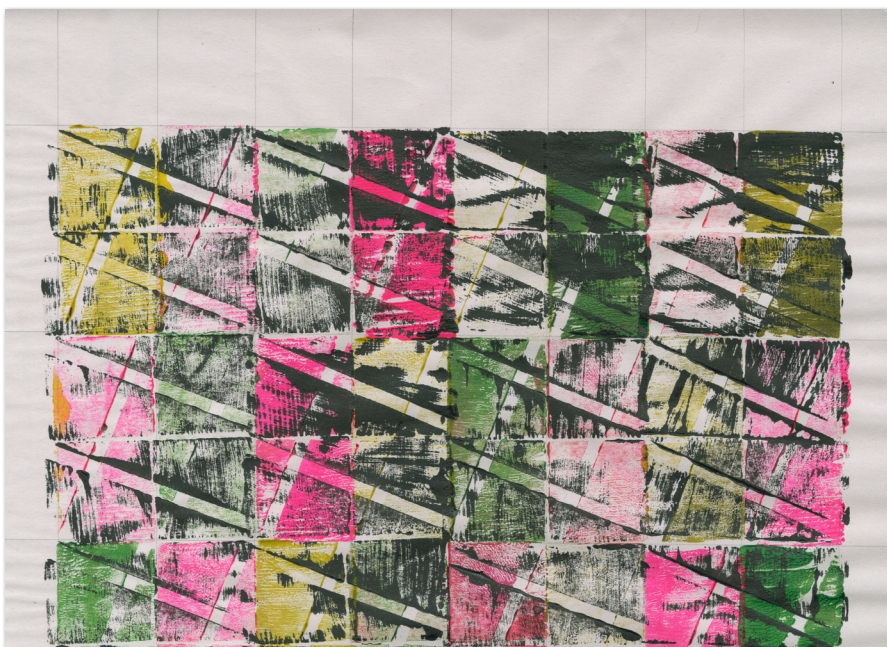
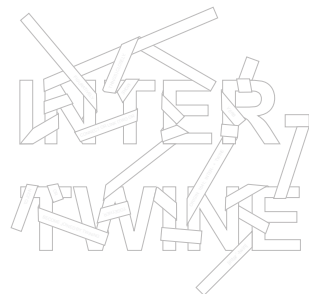
STRUCTURES

A collage of juxtaposed organic and man-made structures, exploring perception and displacement.

Digital photography, black and white laser prints on plain paper.

INTERTWINE

Typographic exploration to exclude the action of intertwining.



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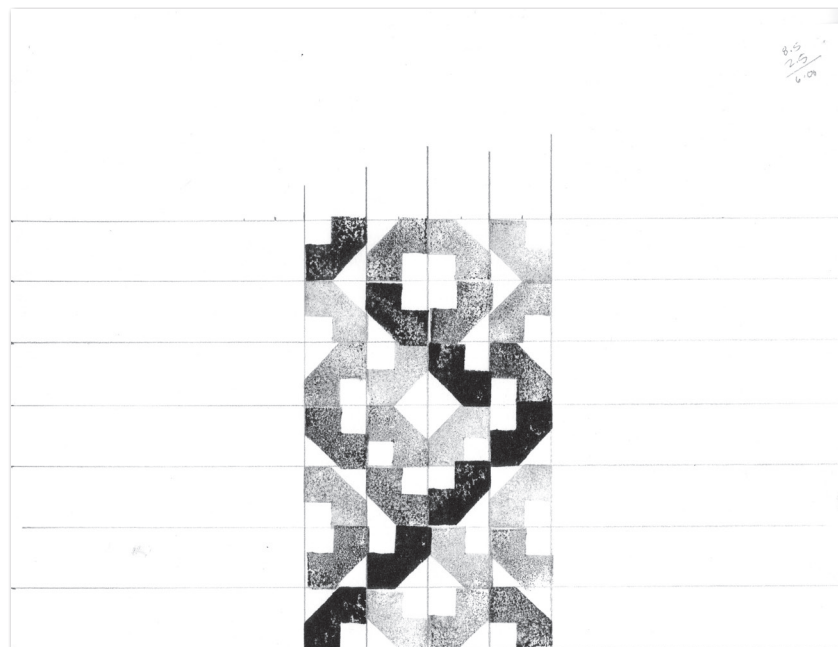


11

WOOD BLOCK STAMPING

One of many studies of texture, modules, and intuition within two-dimensional space.

Handmade wood block stamp, screen printing fabric ink on newsprint paper.



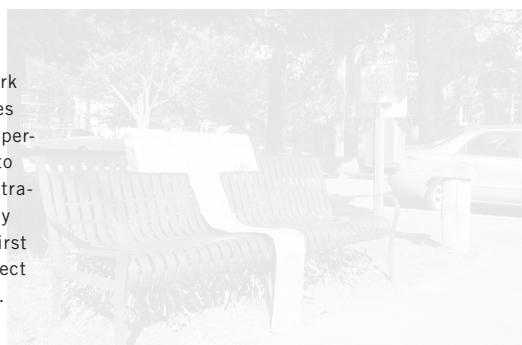
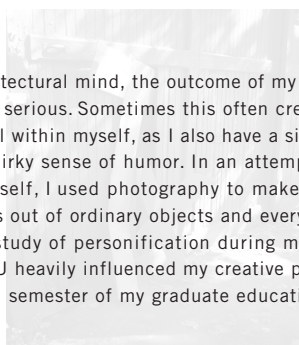


12

RUBBER STAMPING

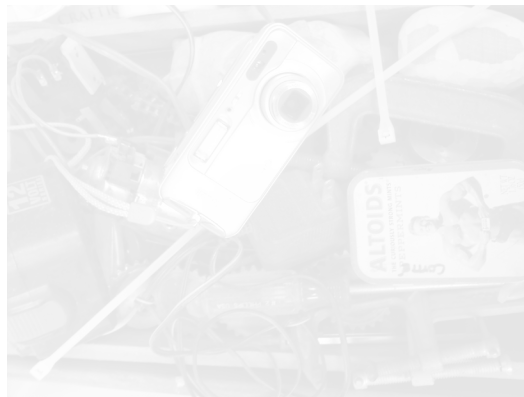
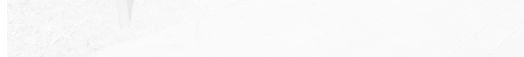
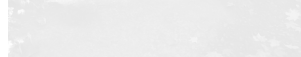
One of many studies of texture, modules, and intuition within two-dimensional space.

Handmade rubber stamp, stamp pad ink on plain paper.



Having an architectural mind, the outcome of my work tends to be too serious. Sometimes this often creates an inner turmoil within myself, as I also have a silly personality and quirky sense of humor. In an attempt to stay true to myself, I used photography to make extraordinary images out of ordinary objects and everyday concepts. The study of personification during my first semester at VCU heavily influenced my creative project during the final semester of my graduate education.

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ADVENTURE WITH A STILL CAMERA

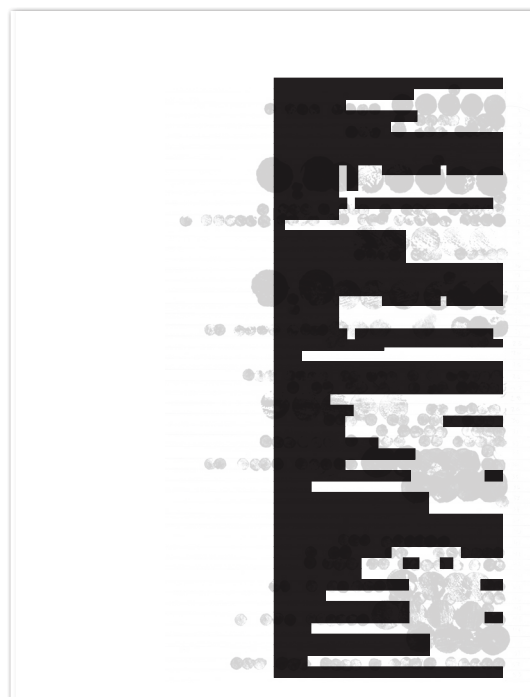
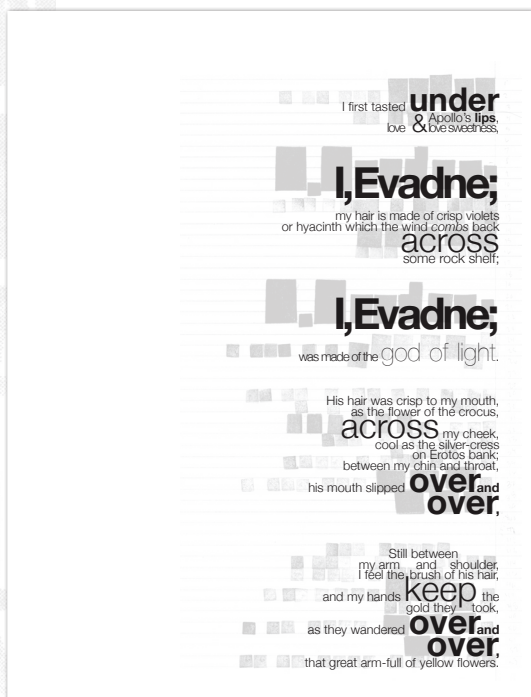
Visual study in personification, spawned from Rob Carter's Adventure-A-Day workshop.

Digital photography.

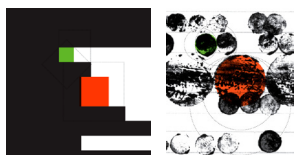
A DAY IN THE LIFE OF T

Visual study in personification, spawned from Rob Carter's Adventure-A-Day workshop.

Combination of cardboard and digital photography.



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the flower o
cross
cool as the
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EVADNE

A study of visual translation,
analyzing the spatial language
of typography. Original poem
by Hilda Doolittle.

Typographic experimentation,
negative/positive subtraction
of text, and wooden + rubber
stamps—ink on plain paper.

Illegibility was the focus of my first four and half months of thesis research, examining our ability to perceive and read displaced typography. I was drawn to this idea, because I was interested in slowing an observer down during their everyday routine, asking them to participate in a typographic event in order to gain meaning.

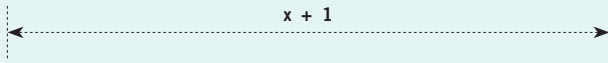
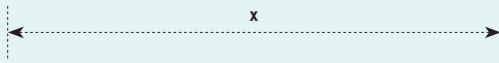
15

PERCEPTION

A study in typographic legibility.

Black and white laser print transfer with blender marker on plain paper.





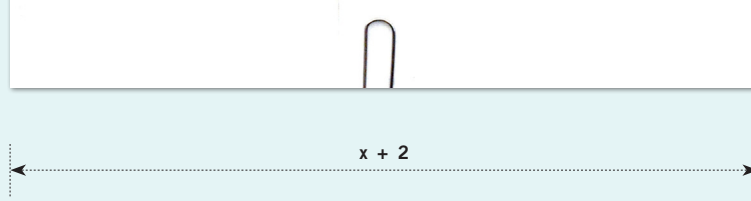
16

SLOW DOWN MODEL SERIES

A study in typographic legibility and perception in space.

Black and white laser print on manipulated bristol board.

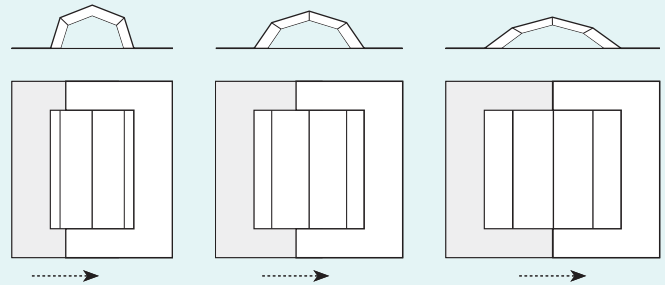




17

As the bristol board is flattened out, the displaced typography becomes more legible.

LEFT—Diagrams of the structural transition between models.



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Subverting the legibility of familiar objects allows for a new way of seeing our world. Applying displacement to objects of utility served as major jumping off point into the honing of my thesis development.

STOP SIGN MODEL

A study in typographic legibility and perception in space.

Color ink jet print on manipulated bristol board.

STOP SIGN

A study in typographic legibility and perception in space.

Combination of paper model and digital photography.





DEFIANCE DEFIANCE

20

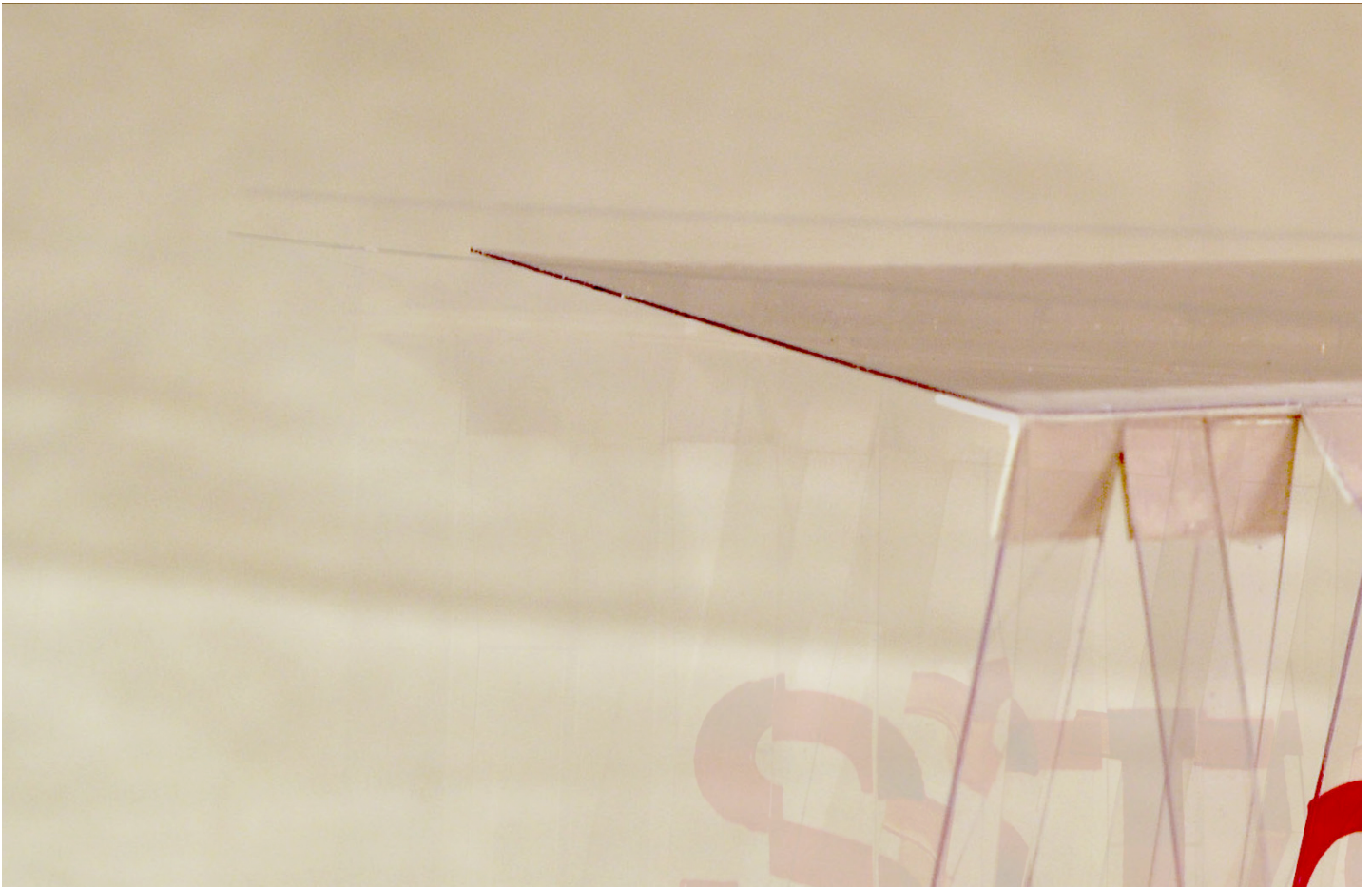
PERSPICUOUS DEFIANCE

A study in typographic legibility
and perception in space.

Combination of paper model and
digital photography.



Mid-third semester, I rediscovered my love for architecture, realizing I could exploit its monumental scale to expose my ideas to a larger audience, and with more power and demand for attention than the stop sign provided.



STOP

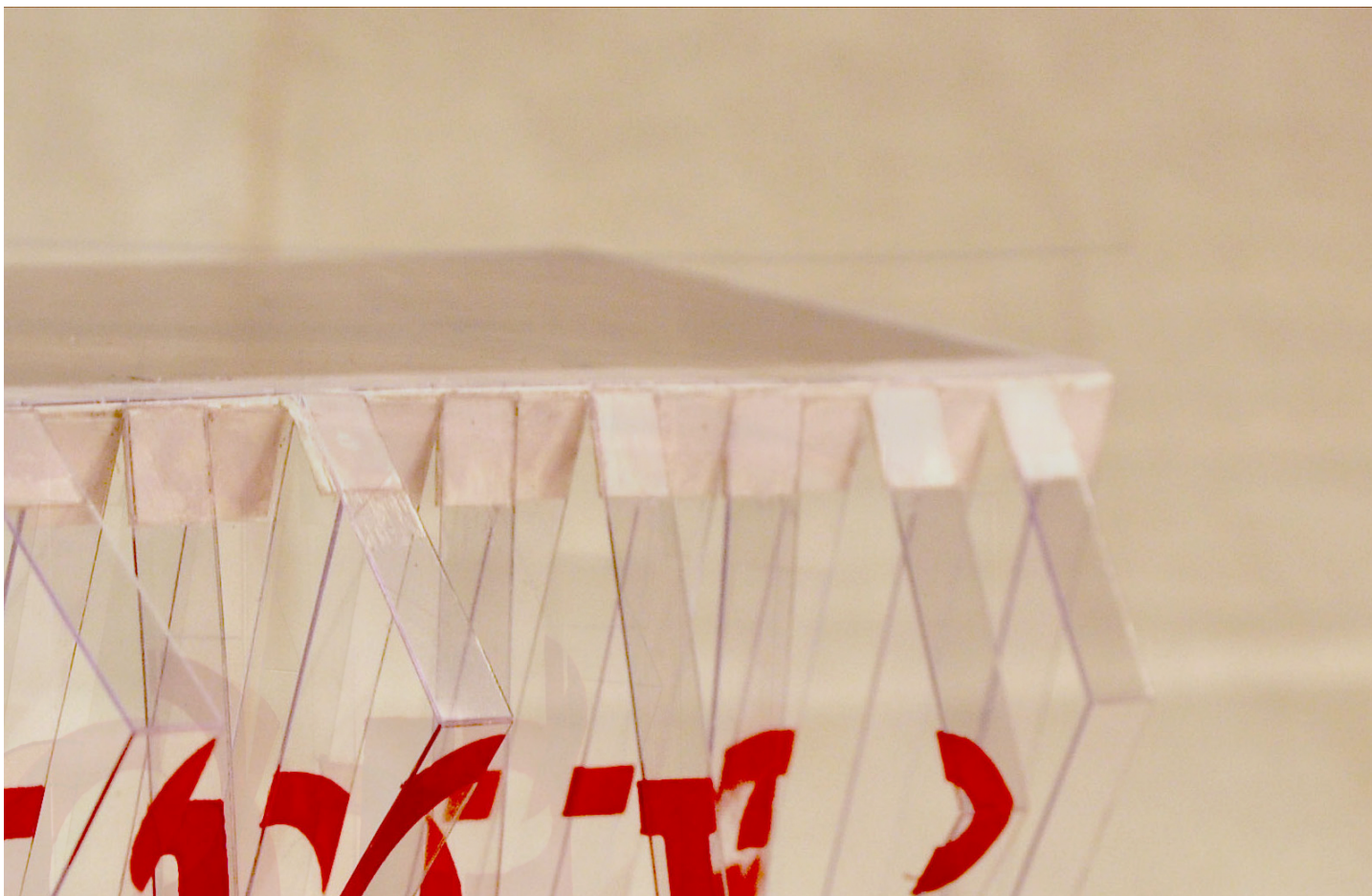


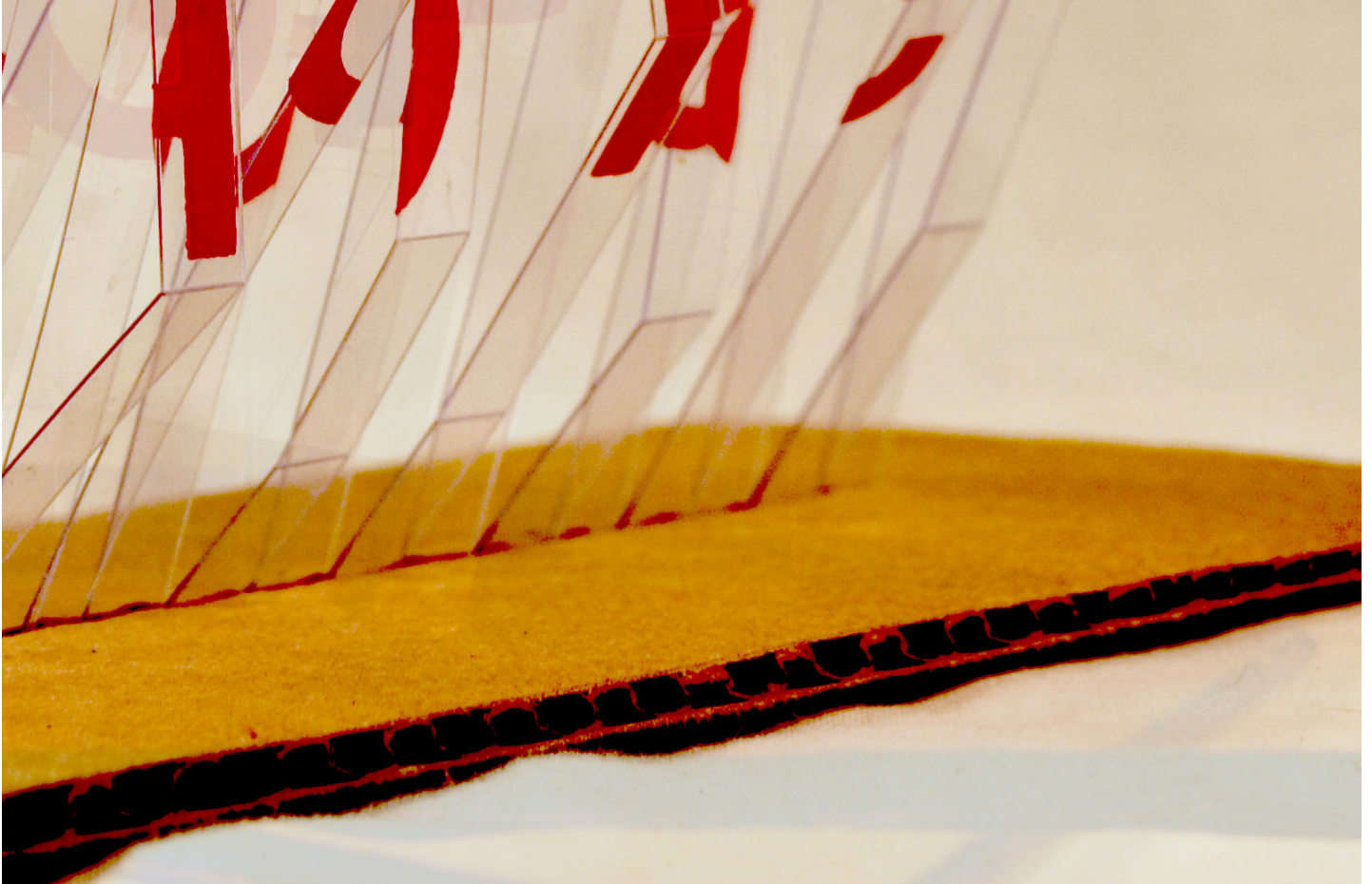
22

BUS STOP

A study in typographic legibility and perception in space.

Combination of digital photography and model constructed from acrylic, cardboard, and typographic stickers.





STOP

A collage of animation stills.

Combination of acrylic model,
digital photography, vector
drawing, and animation.



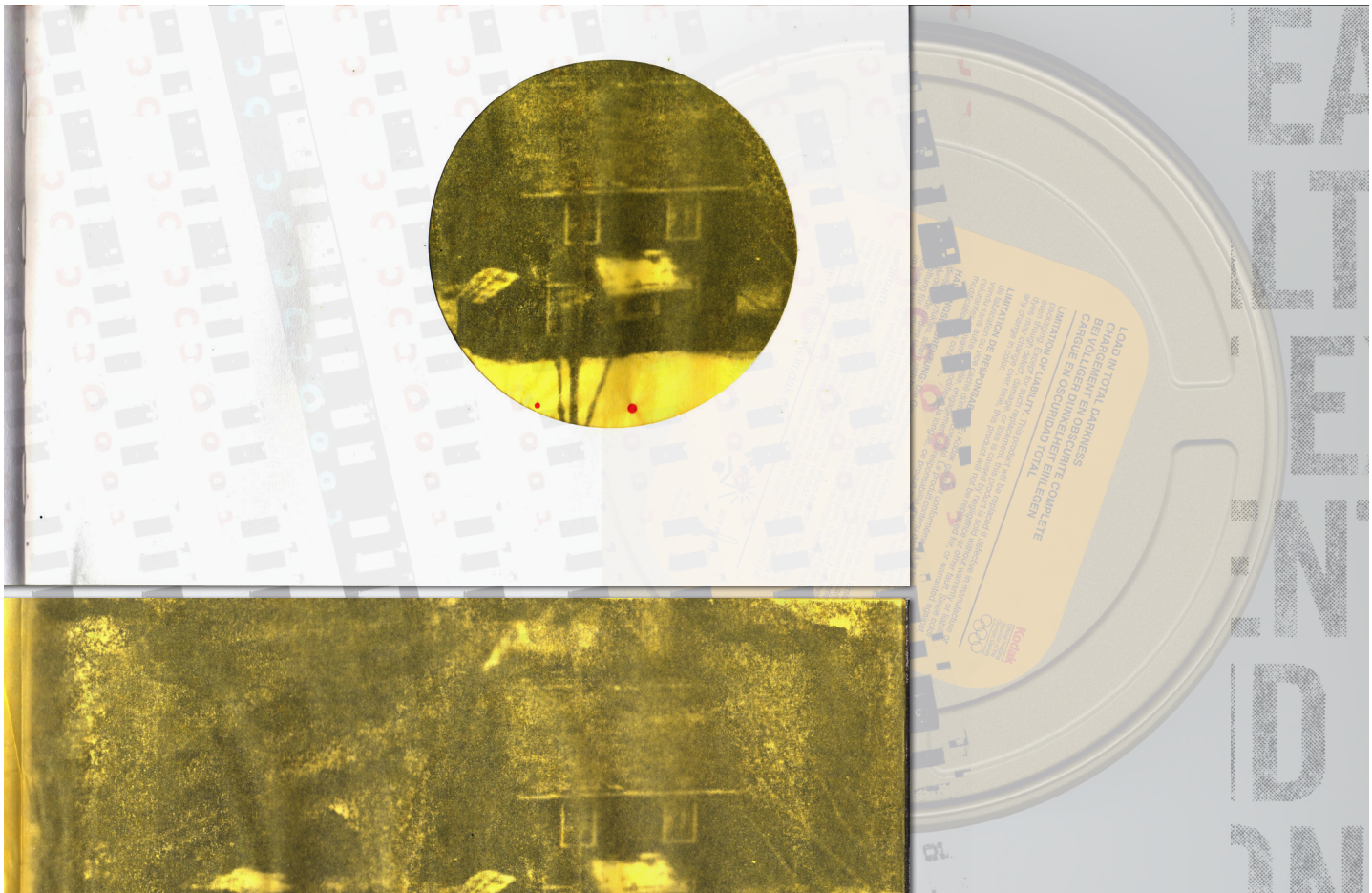


BUS STOP | COMBINATION OF THREE MODEL VIEWS
A study in typographic legibility and perception in space.
Combination of digital photography and model constructed
from acrylic, cardboard, and typographic stickers.



STOP: A MODEL IN MOTION
Animation stills studying perception and legibility in space.

Combination of digital photography of the acrylic model, vector drawing, and animation.





26

REVEAL

Translation of a scene from François Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player*.

Combination of trace paper, acrylic paint, and laser print transfer on plain paper.



Exploring letter press printing, film, and the aspect of revealing a message slowly allowed me to get back in touch with the tactile nature of ink. It also encouraged my continued use of marker transfers during both seminar courses taken during my final year at VCU, and eventually in my final creative project.

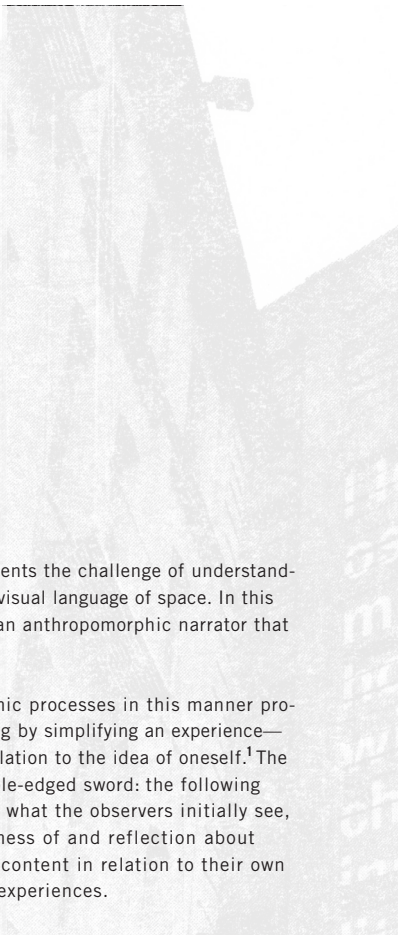
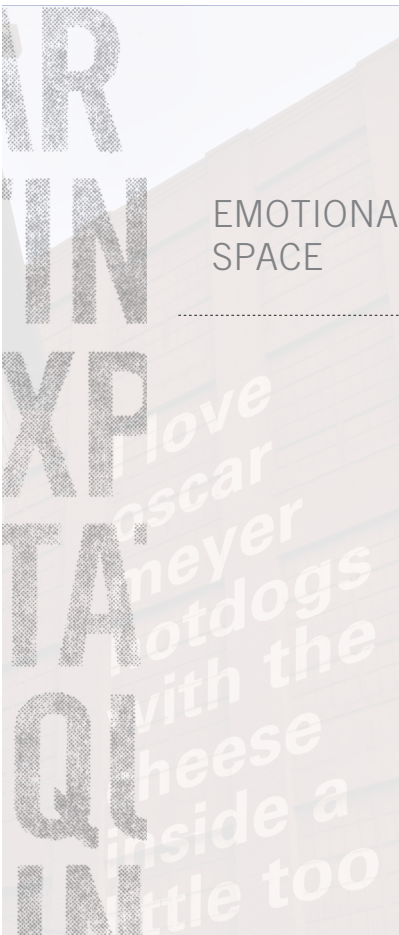
27

42 PICAS/SECOND
A conceptual film.

Combination of letter press
and clear leader 16mm film.

A conceptual film.

The image consists of three vertical panels showing a close-up, low-angle view of a brick building facade. A large mural of Oscar Meyer hotdogs is painted on the wall. The text 'I love oscar meyer hotdogs with the cheese inside a little too' is written in a white, sans-serif font across the mural. The left panel is in color, while the middle and right panels are in black and white. The perspective is looking up at the building, creating a sense of height and scale.



EMOTIONAL SPACE

The following body of work represents the challenge of understanding and revealing the transparent visual language of space. In this creative project, space becomes an anthropomorphic narrator that relays messages and meaning.

I believe utilizing anthropomorphic processes in this manner provokes observers to create meaning by simplifying an experience—a confrontation with space—in relation to the idea of oneself.¹ The confrontation they face is a double-edged sword: the following work elicits contemplation about what the observers initially see, but it also heightens the awareness of and reflection about their emotional reactions to the content in relation to their own personal situation and previous experiences.

The agitations I have composed reveal the quality of the spaces I have documented. I have provided voices for these buildings such that they can express their condition, orientation, proximity, character created by light and shadow, and ultimately their derelict existence. The language of these voices is the same as our own personal conversations—they stir the soul, causing observers to pause.

29

SUBMISSION / 2011_1.28

I love oscar meyer hotdogs with the cheese inside a little too much.

1 René Descartes

Les Passions de L'Âme

"for experience shows us that those who are most agitated by their passions, are not such as understand them best, and

that they are in the catalogue of those apprehensions which the strict alliance between the soul and the body renders confused and obscure...particularly, because, of all kinds of thoughts

that she can have, there are none that agitate, and shake it so hard as these passions do" (Article 28).





I WANT THE WORK TO BE OF UTILITY
TO AS MANY PEOPLE AS POSSIBLE. I
WANT PEOPLE TO CONCENTRATE ON
CONTENT, NOT WHO DONE IT.

JENNY HOLZER

To become intimate with space, one must become intimate with self—acknowledging and understanding one's own fears, joys, memories, and desires.

In an attempt to generate universal messages that could be emotional triggers for observers, I began anonymously collecting fears, joys, memories, and desires from eager participants via Tumblr, a social media website.¹ This method of collection seemed the most appropriate and effective, given society's current obsession with technology—the ability to have the internet wherever you go, losing sight of the profound things that immediately surround you.

The typographic content for this creative project is directly from the Tumblr submissions, with minimal edits, in order to maintain the purity of the authors' voices, as well as their raw emotions.

It is difficult to fully articulate my feelings when reading the submissions. At times, my heart sinks due to the honesty of these people. Though I know none of the submissions are directed specifically towards me, a majority of them are written in a direct I/You fashion, as if the contributors had finally said that secret to whom they wish they would. This linguistic technique can easily fool the mind upon the first read, filling oneself with a rush of emotions—guilt, hurt, sadness, joy. It is during these moments that I know the purity of the messages have transcended our world, collectively whispering at universal decibels.

31

SUBMISSION / 2011_2.06

I'm afraid I'm not as good
as I want to be.

SUBMISSION / 2011_2.08

I fear how much I think "ah, fuck it."

1 TUMBLR URL

Intimacy: Space is Language
<http://kellewhite.tumblr.com>

WONDER

Wonder is a live-action daydream. With each step forward, the daydream unfolds. Closer examinations reveal the world in which we live. Wonder's grandeur provokes contemplation, searching for correlations to previous experiences. Through meditation we escape into inner space, recapturing moments that relentlessly tug at our psyche. In his book *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard describes this process as transporting "the dreamer outside the immediate world to a world that bears the mark of infinity."¹

The daydream's intensity is measured by the level of escape or the distance in which one is mentally removed from their present surroundings. "We do not always see it start, yet it always starts the same way, that is, it flees the object nearby and right away it is far off, elsewhere, in the space of elsewhere."²

The result of wonder is a conscious attachment to an agitation—one that lodges within our emotional vulnerability, prying at the intimate meaning between oneself and an object, or the entire world. Reflection upon wondering ultimately assists in an understanding of self. As one evolve through contemplation, an answer is revealed—an acknowledgement about oneself is understood through the free exploration of the psyche. These daydreams are an expansion of being, where the sense of existence is immensely increased.³

In this thought, the idea of "space" or "a space" exists in the physical, dimensional terms of an agitation, as well as, within the mental processes and argumentation provoked by its observation.

SUMMARY

Wonder is a fascination with the unexpected.
Daydreams are an intimate contemplation of self in relation to the world.
Agitation induces higher consciousness.

Gaston Bachelard | *The Poetics of Space* | Boston: Beacon Press, 1969

1 "And this contemplation produces an attitude that is so special, an inner state that is so unlike any other, that the daydream transports the dreamer outside the immediate world to a world that bears the mark of infinity" (183).

2 "We do not always see it start, yet it always starts the same way, that is, it flees the object nearby and right away it is far off, elsewhere, in the space of elsewhere" (183-184).

3 "Immensity is within ourselves. It is attached to a sort of expansion of being that life curbs and caution arrests, but which starts again when we are alone" (184).

"And Baudelaire says, in fact, that at such moments 'the sense of existence is immensely increased.' Here we discover that immensity in the intimate domain is intensity, an intensity of being, the intensity of being evolving in vast perspective of intimate immensity" (193).

32

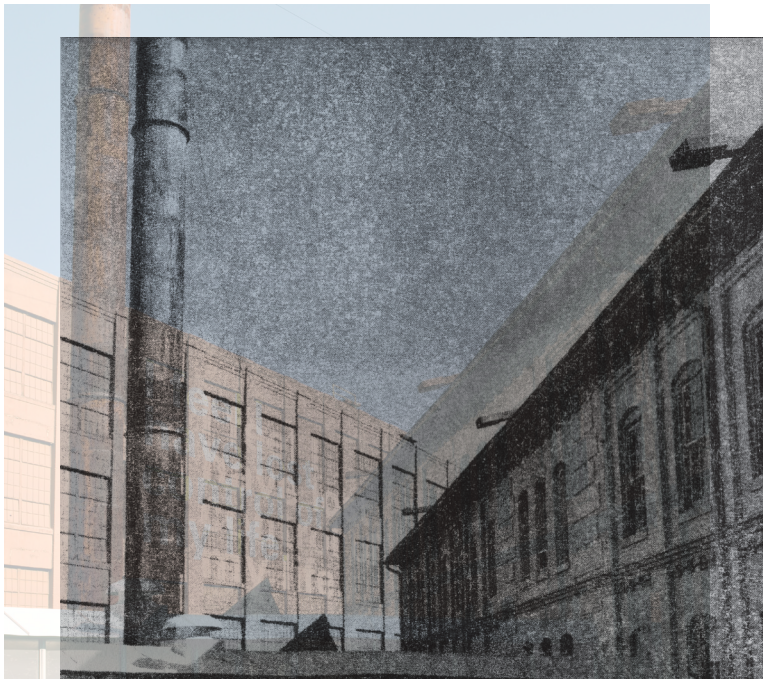
SUBMISSION / 2011_1.30

I fear growing old alone.
I feel I have lost control
of my life.

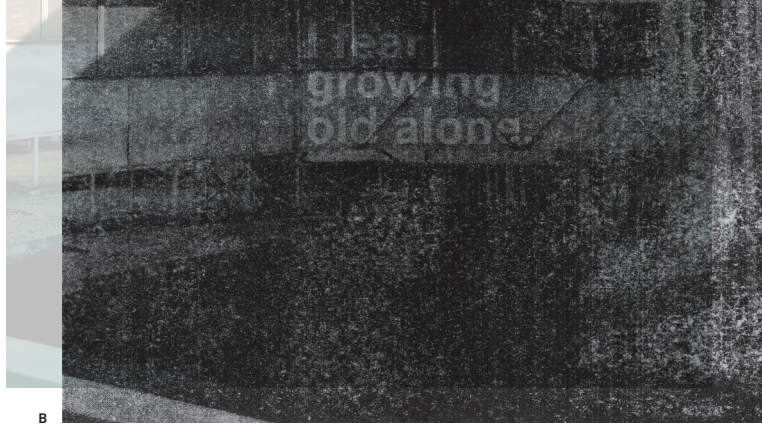




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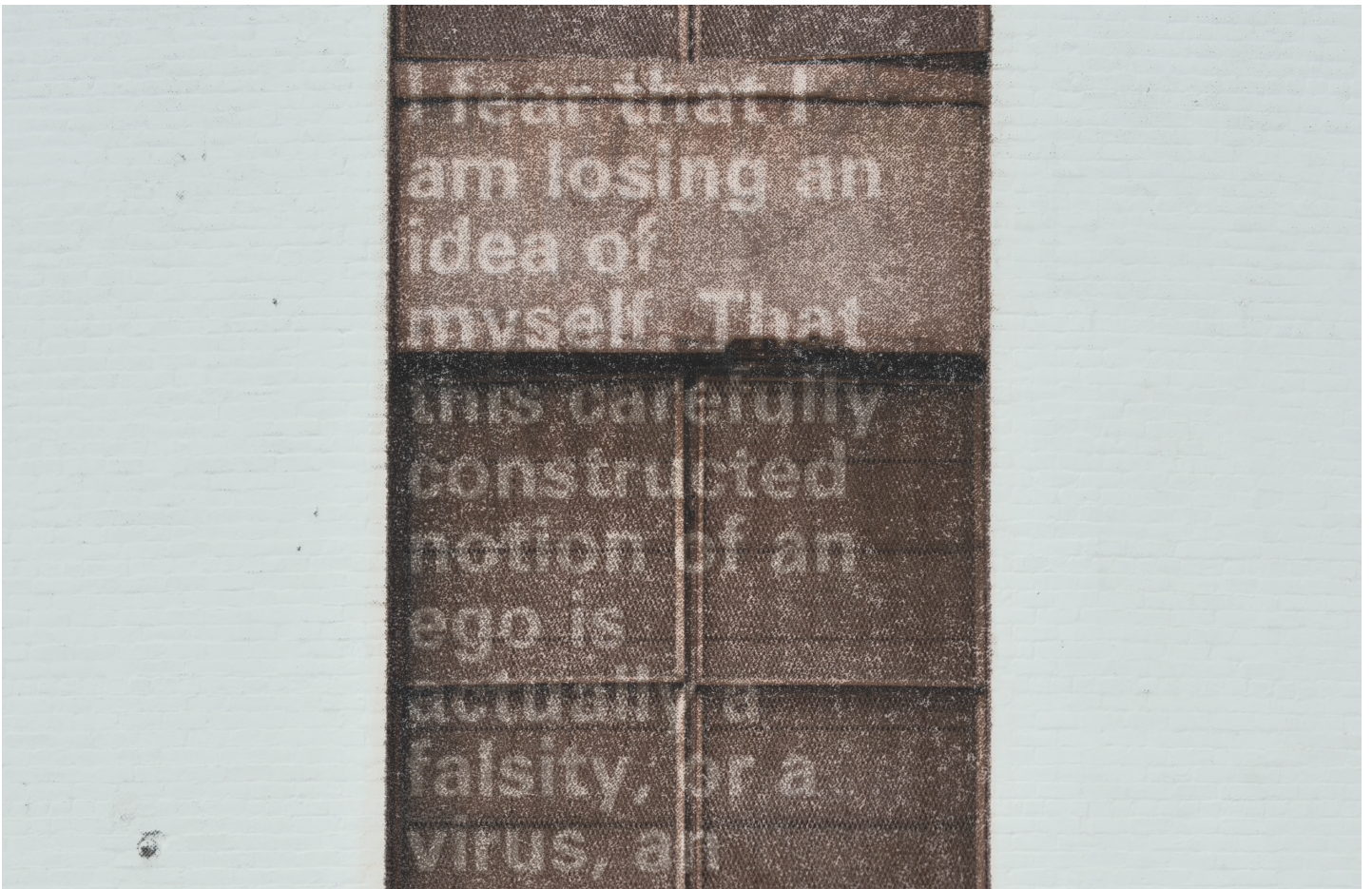
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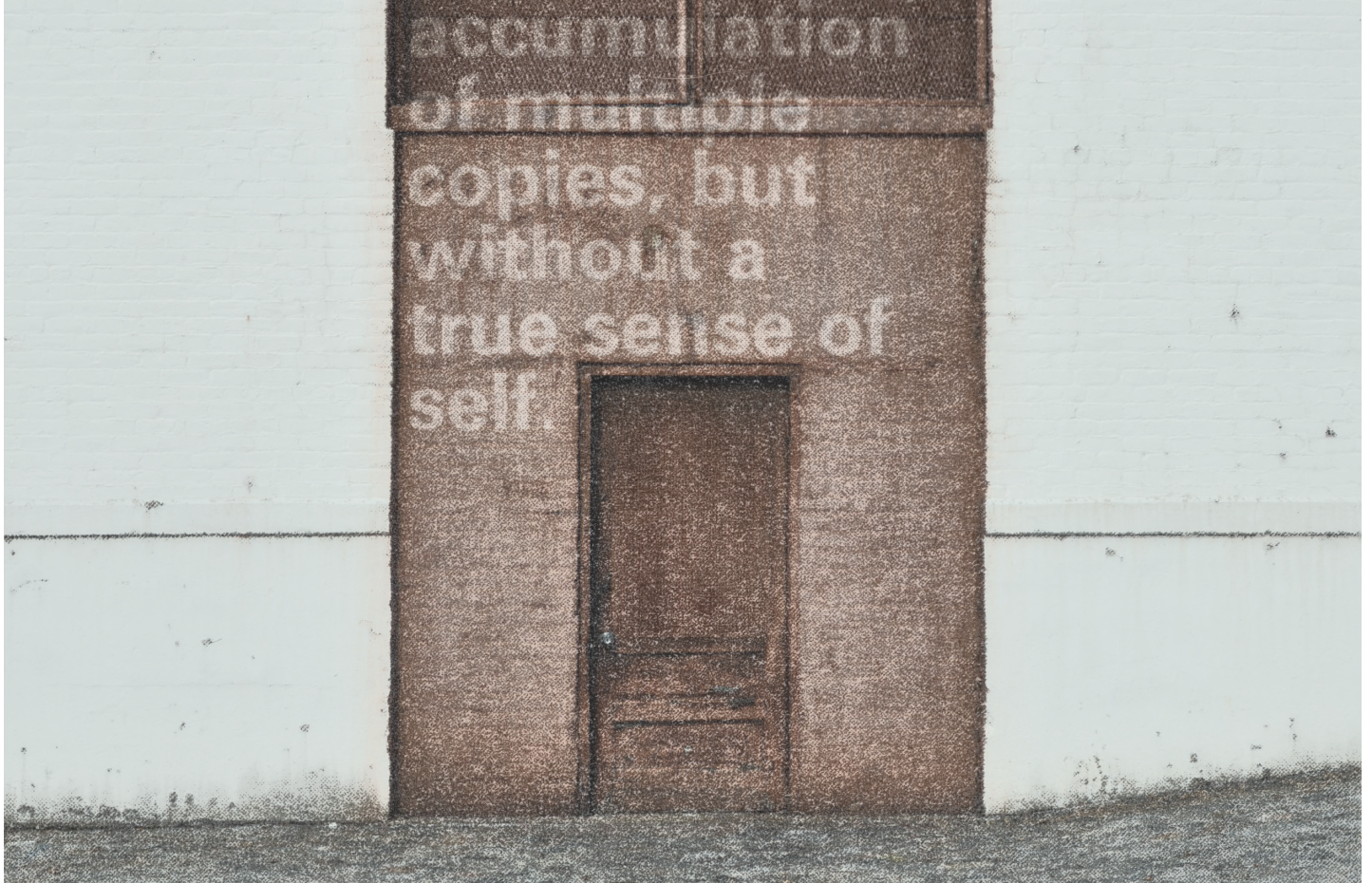


34

TOOLS OF IMPLEMENTATION

Photography provides the ability to document space and discover specific angles of intimacy. Typography brings additional meaning and provokes wonder through juxtaposition. Marker transfers emphasize wear, memory, loss, and relinquishment.





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I WORK WITH PICTURES AND
WORDS BECAUSE THEY HAVE THE
ABILITY TO DETERMINE WHO WE
ARE AND WHO WE AREN'T.

BARBARA KRUGER

The spaces shown are located in downtown Richmond, Virginia. These structures were once production warehouses for the Reynolds Tobacco Company, and later for the Reynolds Metals Company. Prior to finding these buildings, I set three criteria for finding spaces:

- Conducive to utilizing intimacy + emotion.
- A sense of age or a timeline of change.
- Easily accessible/visible by a passerby.

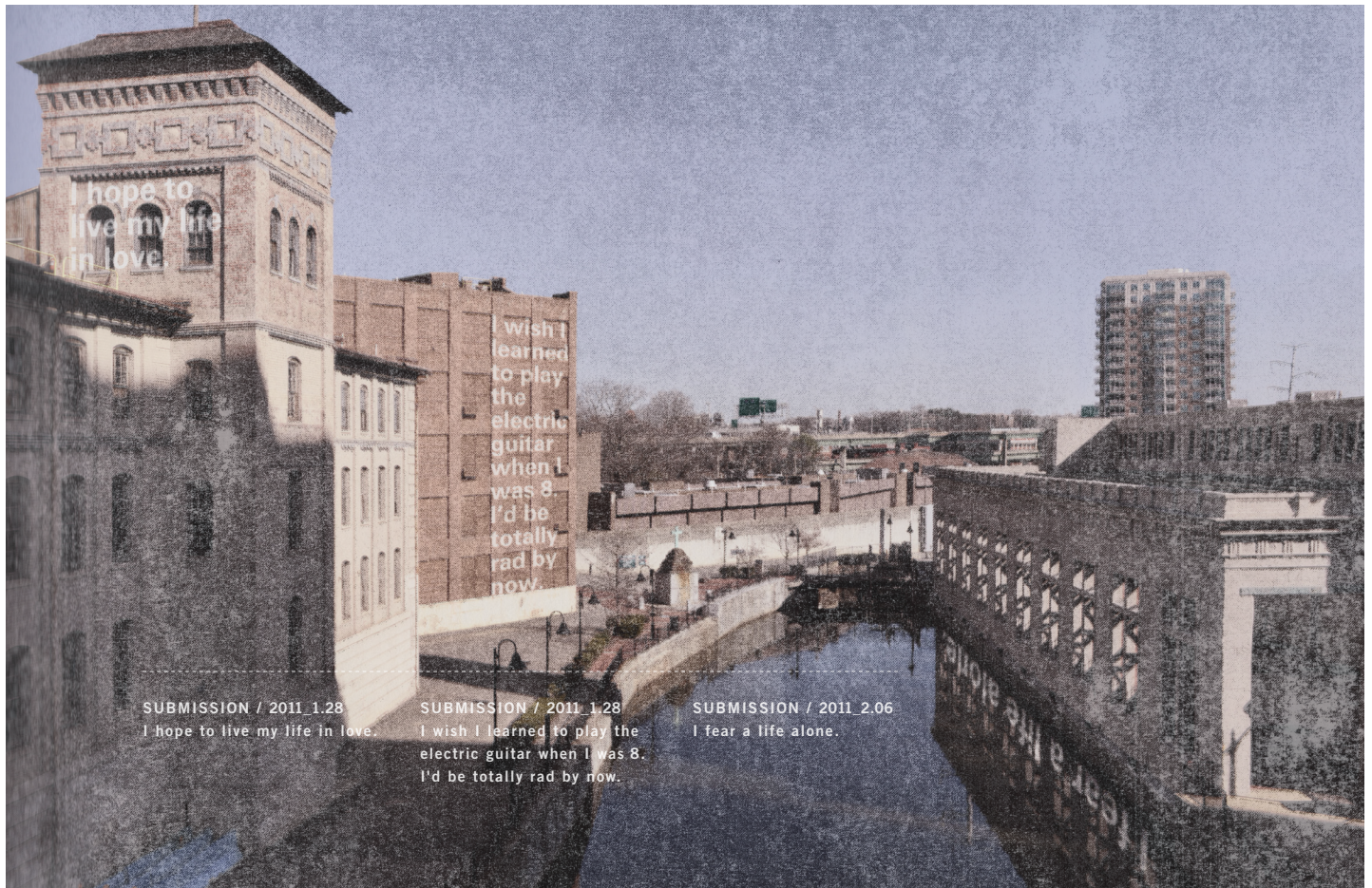
I chose this site because of my initial intrigue with the space, and because the structures induced wonder within me. I wanted to know their history, and also to document their uniqueness. Along with being derelict, the warehouses are situated along Richmond's Canal Walk, which transforms the observation of the structures, convincingly enough, to make you feel as though you just stepped into the streets of Venice, Italy.

36

SUBMISSION / 2011_2.07

I fear that I am losing an idea of myself. That this carefully constructed notion of an ego

is actually a falsity, or a virus, an accumulation of multiple copies, but without a true sense of self.



SUBMISSION / 2011_1.28

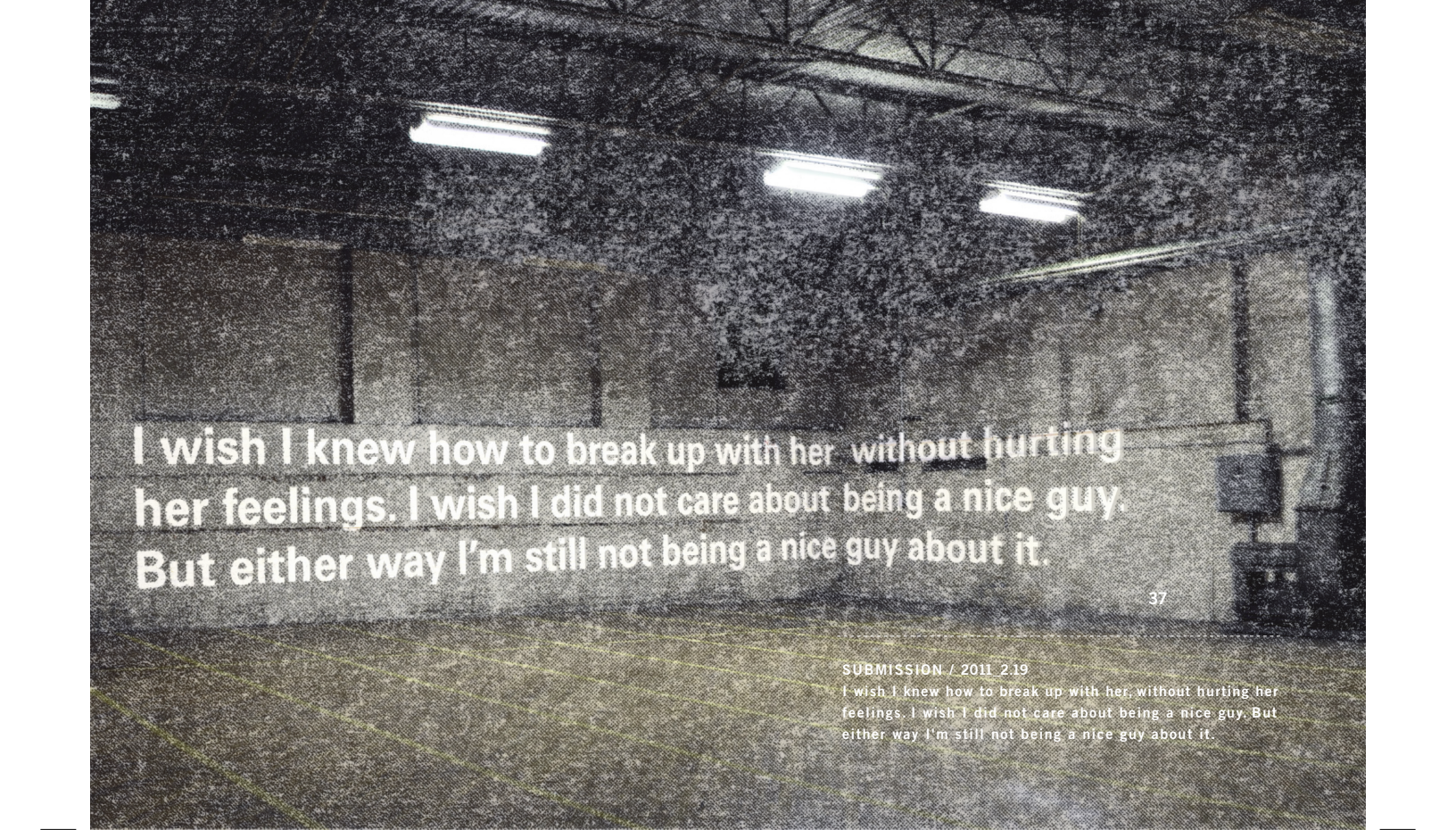
I hope to live my life in love.

SUBMISSION / 2011_1.28

I wish I learned to play the electric guitar when I was 8. I'd be totally rad by now.

SUBMISSION / 2011_2.06

I fear a life alone.




I wish I knew how to break up with her without hurting
her feelings. I wish I did not care about being a nice guy.
But either way I'm still not being a nice guy about it.

37

SUBMISSION / 2011 2.19

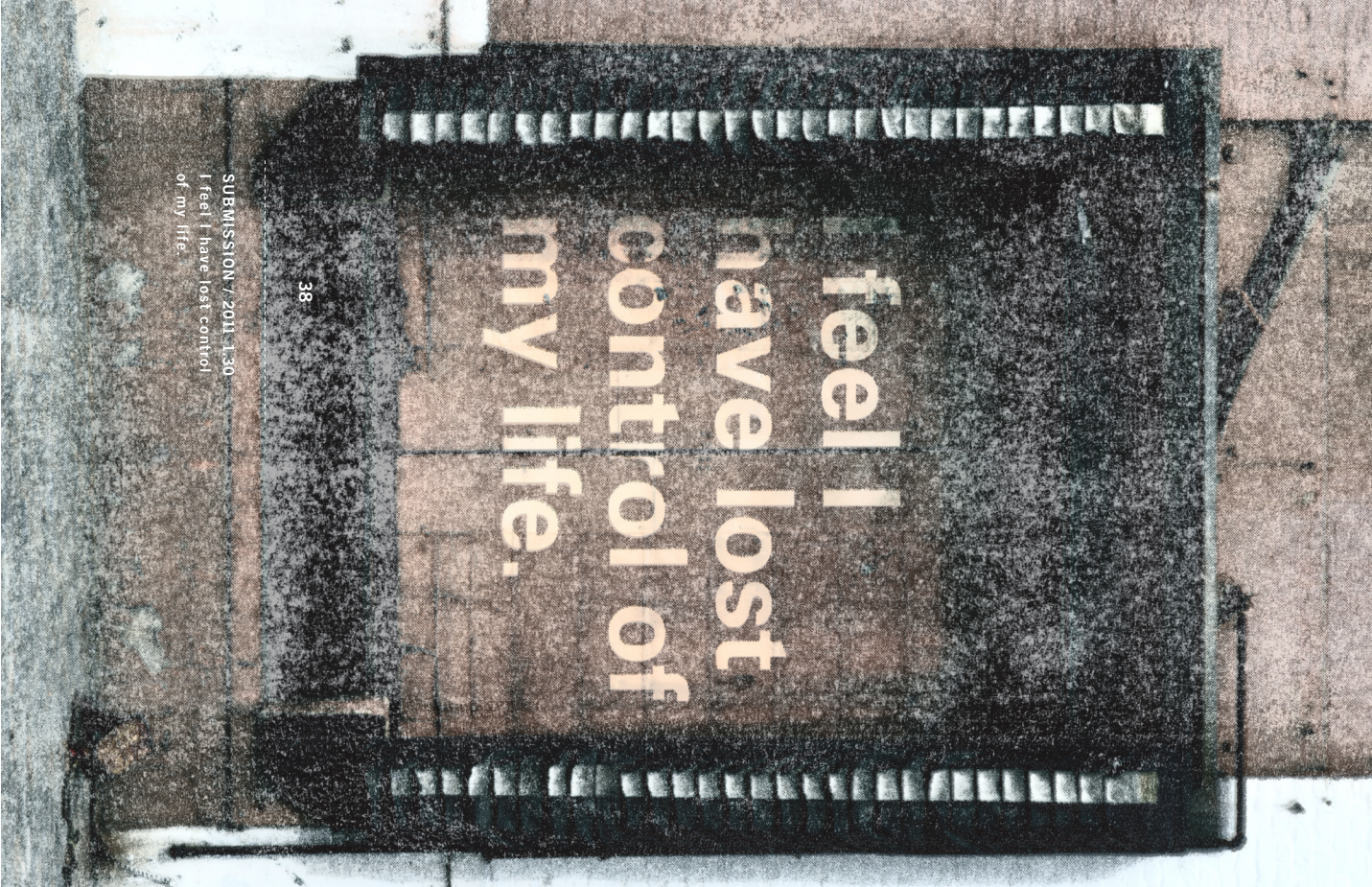
I wish I knew how to break up with her, without hurting her
feelings, I wish I did not care about being a nice guy. But
either way I'm still not being a nice guy about it.



SUBMISSION / 2011 3.22

I'm too far away to hold her, we
spend hours on the phone
sniffing, but not talking. No
one knows what to do.

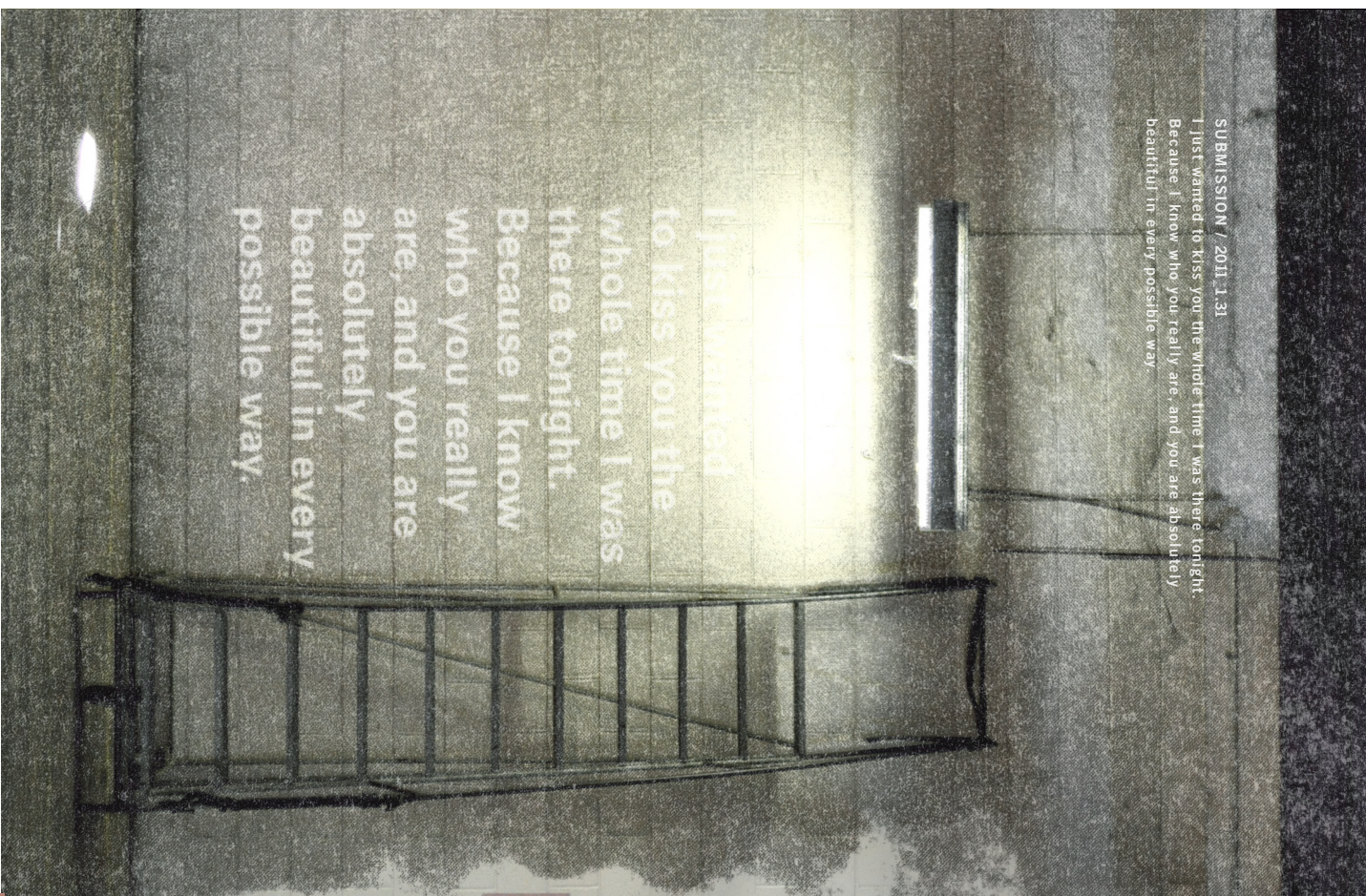
*I'm too far away to hold her, we
spend hours on the phone sniffing,
but not talking. No one knows
what to do.*



I feel I
have lost
control of
my life.


38

SUBMISSION / 2011.1.30
I feel I have lost control
of my life.



SUBMISSION / 2011.1.31
I just wanted to kiss you the whole time I was there tonight.
Because I know who you really are, and you are absolutely
beautiful in every possible way.

I just wanted
to kiss you the
whole time I was
there tonight.
Because I know
who you really
are, and you are
absolutely
beautiful in every
possible way.



I hope to find someone who
appreciates and
notices the small
things in life.

39

SUBMISSION / 2011 1.31
I hope to find someone who
appreciates and notices the
small things in life.

AGITATE
WONDER
PERCEIVE

AGITATE > WONDER > PERCEIVE was an installation at Virginia Commonwealth University's 1509 West Main Street Gallery on April 1st, 2011. This collaborative event was curated and designed by my colleague, Brandi Price, and me. The goal of the exhibit was to merge space and experience, triggering wonder and heightening viewers' perception.

The installation included original sound and video pieces composed by Price and several Tumblr submissions, which I designed and displayed as static and kinetic typography of varying scales and textures. All imagery and typography was projected onto 5' x 8' translucent scrims, hung asymmetrically throughout the space.

Guests were encouraged to meander throughout the scrims and projections, allowing their shadows and performance to become a significant part of the exhibition. Some guests were very eager to participate, while others remained shy, along the periphery. Price and I had yet to realize that we had defined a space by not defining space. We had unconsciously created a 'choose your own adventure' black-box theatre within the ambiguity of the gallery.

The consensus was that the installation was a great success. Nothing of this nature had yet to be created in this space, and so well attended.¹ However, the guests' personal reactions to the content remained mixed, ranging from sheer excitement and joy, to being utterly confused and assaulted by the marrying of these specific messages and sounds.

40

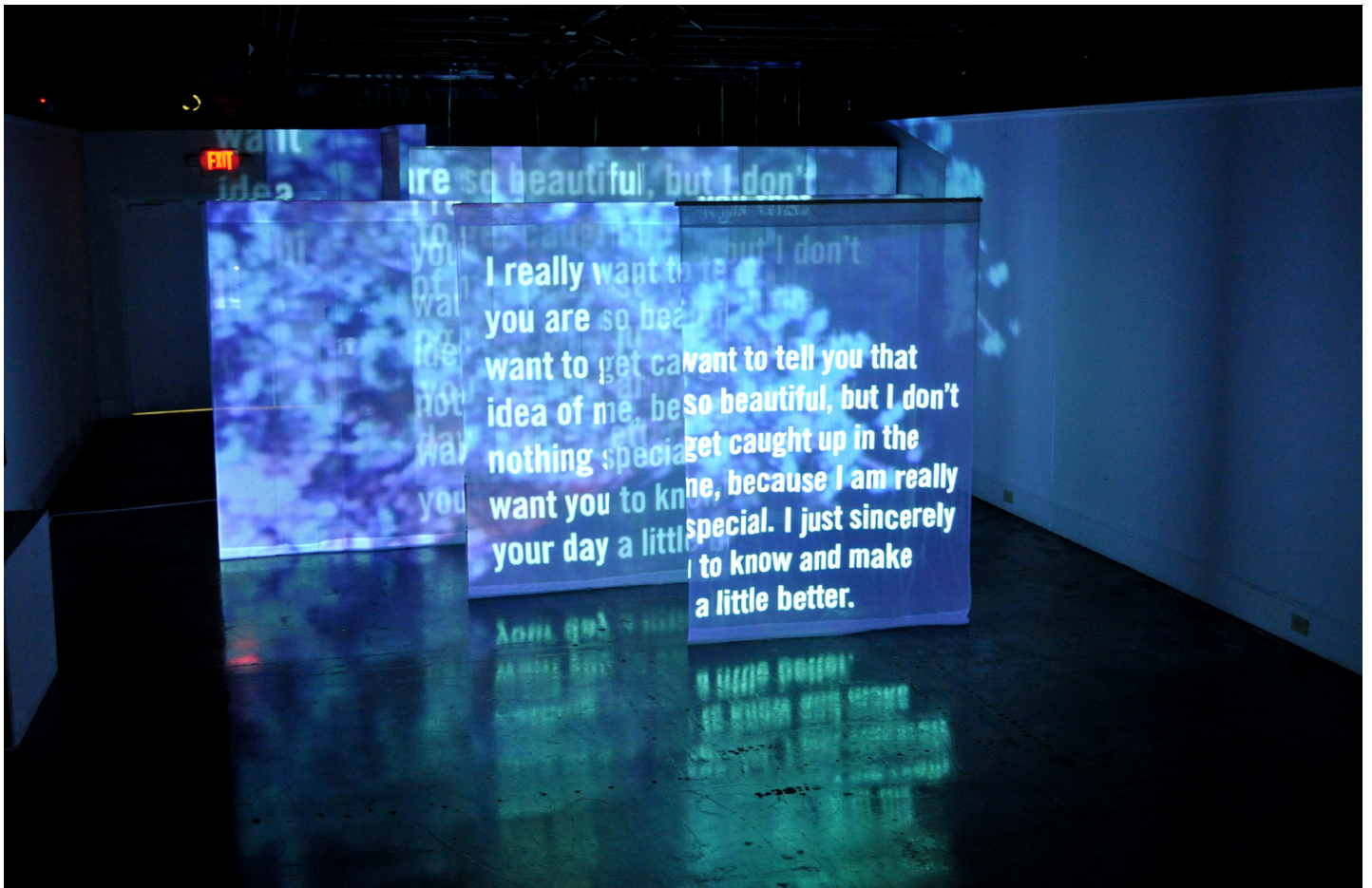
¹ As remarked by Associate Professor Steve Hoskins in passing.





41

AGITATE>WONDER>PERCEIVE
Gallery installation on April 1st, 2011 at 1509
West Main Street, Richmond, Virginia.





42

AGITATE>WONDER>PERCEIVE
Gallery installation on April 1st, 2011 at 1509
West Main Street, Richmond, Virginia.

MY CON

To say 'graduate school is hard' would be an understatement. It is a challenge set forth with unforeseen endings. Once the semesters culminate, there really is no end. Explorations are not suddenly dead. Continuing questions arise and persist. This is my new self. This is my new consciousness.

I've spent my adult life running, or trying to run, from where I grew up—believing that there must be amazing life experiences outside of Virginia, ones that would change me for a lifetime and ultimately get me out of this place. I suppose this naïve way of viewing the world is in some cases true; but for me, it unexpectedly became incorrect.

Yes, I left Virginia. And yes, those experiences have changed me—who I am, what I do, and how I see. However, it was the return to Virginia that became my saving grace. I found enlightenment beyond the mundane here, in Virginia, at home.

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SUBMISSION / 2011-2012

I ask only because I am scared.
I am scared only because I
am uncertain. To know and be
known. Doubt is nature.

43

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I spent my first seven months at Virginia Commonwealth University rejecting architecture. My experience in professional practice, though inspiring and abundantly full of new knowledge, felt tainted. Something wasn't right in the water that was tread from academia into career. I came to graduate school thirsty for a fresh start, a new direction. This I have achieved, and did so by falling back in love with where I began.¹

The mental and emotional exhaustion of finding oneself as a designer in multiple disciplines has been taxing. It leaves me constantly questioning my role and what I can give. But at the end of the day, I do what is important to me, and what I believe others should see and experience.

The work I have produced during my return to academia is not professionally pragmatic. There is no function derived by a specific client need. I suppose if there were a client, it would be myself as a liaison for those things that have no voice, for those things that cannot speak, for those things that have been neglected.

In this work, I have created spaces that speak back to us and to each other. I believe these spaces that I captured indeed have their own interpretable language. In order to express this language to others, I felt the spaces needed a more intelligible voice, and so I gave them one. In doing so, I have also called out the importance of vitality in our environments. Too often, we forget our surroundings, neighborhoods, local crises, etc. amongst daily routine. Our negligence should cease, while our ownership and appreciation needs to reemerge. Our spaces define us and reflect our opinions of them. I hope that through utilizing methods of

wonder that this consciousness can be spread to others—to the wide range of professions in the design community as well as the people that they serve and construct around. I want others to actually see the world in which they live. I want them to decide if they like what they see. Hopefully, in turn, they will be encouraged to participate and become involved in creating the world in which they want to live.

If I have been fully successful is somewhat difficult to judge. I have received assorted feedback, including this lovely quote from my colleague, Ernest Bernhardt, “As I pass back and forth to pour a cup of coffee, I can’t help but see your work on the desk. What I get from it is nice. I find the poetic content of your messages, as well as the melancholic light/texture of photographed environments, to enhance and transform the meaning of architecture and space into something provocative and contemplative. I want to spend time there.” Despite this, I have received others as simple, and disturbing, as “It’s about date rape, right?”

44

1 Richard Bach, American Writer
“If you love someone, set them free.
If they come back they’re yours, if
they don’t they never were.”

Perhaps, my explorations are less about the spaces I have transformed and more about how they have transformed me. I am hesitant to predict my future endeavors, as I have been living on the fly for the past few years, and with exceptional and pleasantly unexpected results. I would regret disturbing this organic process. Nevertheless, whether my path takes me back towards architecture or on to visual communications (or the harmonious collaboration of both), I do know that I will be creating engaging, universal spaces.

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SUBMISSION / 2011 2.18

I ask only because I am scared. I am scared only because I am uncertain—to know and be known...Doubt is nature.

FROM SMALL TO LARGE

Derelict Homes + Rec.Center
Church Hill | Richmond, Virginia

Candy Chang | *Before I Die*
New Orleans, Louisiana



The main goal for my future is to become more actively involved within my community. I would like to be able to provide the full breadth of my knowledge and skills in ways that could encourage rehabilitation and promote awareness of our derelict spaces. In turn, I would be satisfied knowing that I assisted in returning the vitality and importance to our places.



SUBMISSION / 2011 2.18

I ask only because I am scared. I am scared only because I am uncertain—to know and be known...Doubt is nature.



Located in a parking lot adjacent to 1509 West Main Street, projecting onto a neighboring structure.

SUBMISSION / 2011 2.08
I fear how much I think "ah, fuck it."

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INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE

Herbert Matter, Graphic Designer and Photographer.

The textured and layered quality of his work remains invaluable and serves as great inspiration in my own work, where I experiment with combining photography and marker transfers.

SPECIAL THANKS TO

MY COMMITTEE AND FACULTY

John Malinoski + Mary McLaughlin + Camden Whitehead

There are not enough words to express my gratitude. Your exceptional guidance has forever changed me. Thank you for being so generous with your time, wisdom, and enthusiasm.

Steve Hoskins

Your dedication as an educator does not go unrecognized. Thank you for your candor and continual eagerness to help.

Roy McKelvey | Rob Carter | Sandy Wheeler | Jamie Mahoney | Anne Graves | John DeMao

I am indebted to you for the education and knowledge that you have provided. Thank you for assisting me to become a better visual communicator and typographer, as well as a more conscientious architectural designer.

MY FELLOW VCU GRADUATE STUDENTS, ESPECIALLY

Brandi Price

You were fantastic studiomate and collaborative partner. Your presence was an inspiration, constantly encouraging me to be the best designer I can be. Thank you for convincing me to finally let go of control a little.

Meaghan Dee

We shared many fun adventures when things got a little too tough around studio. Sticky Rice and New York Deli will never be the same without you. 618/124

Without your encouragement, none of this would have been possible.
Thank you.

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Our invigorating talks about architecture and graphic design will never be forgotten. Thank you for your ability to articulate my thoughts more elegantly than I ever could have imagined.

Meena Khalili Clifford

Your positive attitude and passion for design have shown me the true value of my work. I hope that we can remain Soul Sisters fo' life.

MY HELPERS

Kyle Harris + Yoon-Young Chai

AGITATE > WONDER > PERCEIVE was a hit! Thank you for your aid in construction, advertising, and documentation of the event.

Walter Parks + Sarah McInerney + Patrick Hummel + Mimi Sadler

Thank you for your time and for appeasing the demands of a silly graduate student. It was a pleasure to experience and learn more about the Reynolds buildings of Richmond, Virginia.

Anonymous Tumblr Contributors

You brought my vision to life. Thank you for your intimate voices.

MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS

You are my safe haven. Thank you for always being there and believing in me.

We plan our lives according to a dream that came to us in our childhood, and we find that life alters our plans. And yet, at the end, from a rare height, we also see that our dream was our fate. It's just that providence had other ideas as to how we would get there. Destiny plans a different route, or turns the dream around, as if it were a riddle, and fulfills the dream in ways we couldn't have expected.

Ben Okri / Nigerian Poet + Novelist

This quote has traveled with me throughout all of my academic and professional endeavors, and is one that I plan to reflect upon for a lifetime.

This document was written and designed by Kelley White in Richmond, Virginia in 2011. The text is set in Trade Gothic. The paper is Neenah uv/ultra II translucent and Hammermill color copy digital, layered atop one another.



